



*Naturally Yours*

# NATURAL AREAS NEWSLETTER

January 1990

The Natural Areas Program is sponsored by  
Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife

## Do you want to...

- meet other volunteer stewards
- improve your skills and knowledge of stewardship
- be recognized for your stewardship efforts
- help strengthen the Volunteer Steward Program
- have fun

If you answered yes to any of the above, you should plan to attend the **Natural Areas Volunteer Steward Conference**. The conference will take place **April 27 to April 29, 1990** at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre. For more information and details on registration, see insert A.



*The northern saw-whet owl may be spotted on the field trip planned for the Sherwood Park Natural Area.*

## LOOKING FOR TREASURE (Conservation Data Centre)

Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife is presently examining the feasibility of joining a hemispheric network of Conservation Data Centres. Peter Lee, Manager of the Natural and Protected Areas Section of the Public Lands Division, has been asked jointly by The Nature Conservancy of Canada and senior management in the department to take a two-month leave from his job in order to tackle this assignment.

"The system has rapidly expanded to include 50 states in the U.S., eight Latin American countries and Quebec," said Peter. "Essentially, it is a dynamic, institutional memory of biological data. In other words, the system would focus on the search for, and recording of, Alberta's biological treasures."

Norbert Kondla, of the department's Resource Information Branch, has faced the problems of dealing with information on biological species. "Most species in Alberta have ranges that are also outside the province," he said. "Biological species do not recognize human jurisdictional and political boundaries. Consequently, there are enormous advantages to being tied into a data bank system that is consistent from province to province and country to country. Decision-makers in both the government and private sector are presently hampered by the lack of a convenient source of information on significant biological features."

Such centres have the following practical applications: setting land protection priorities; environmental impact assessment referrals; improvements in resource management; endangered species reviews; and research and education.

The Natural Areas Program could benefit from a biological data management system to help in selecting new candidate sites and to "track" and manage species and features on existing sites.

## FIVE NEW SITES "FLAGGED" FOR PROTECTION

In an ongoing effort to identify, assess and protect lands with significant natural features, five sites totalling approximately 1200 ha have recently been placed under a protective notation for Natural Area purposes. A protective notation reservation serves as a "red flag", identifying a parcel of land in government land records (Land Status Automated Systems-LSAS) as requiring special management consideration and as being of interest to a specific government agency/program. The notation ensures that any activity proposed for that land will be referred to the interested agency.

A Natural Area reservation is the first and lowest level of protection for a site. Reserved sites, once all outstanding issues have been resolved, may be recommended for designation under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act*. The Act affords a higher level of protection to a site because it comes under legislation, rather than policy under which reserved sites are managed.

The five recent additions are spread throughout central and northern Alberta (see Map 1).

A quarter section of land adjacent the existing **Anderson Creek Natural Area** has been added to it. The addition was suggested by Fred Schutz, the volunteer steward for Anderson Creek. This 65 ha addition includes a great blue heron nesting site. It is also the location of a cooperative project between the Red Deer River Naturalists and Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division that involved installing heron nesting platforms. It is approximately 25 km northwest of Rimbey.

The Pembina Fish and Game Association recommended an 840 ha site, 20 km northwest of Thorhild, that is now under a Natural Area reservation. This site, **Tawatinaw Natural Area** has a variety of wetland types with extensive peatlands. It is

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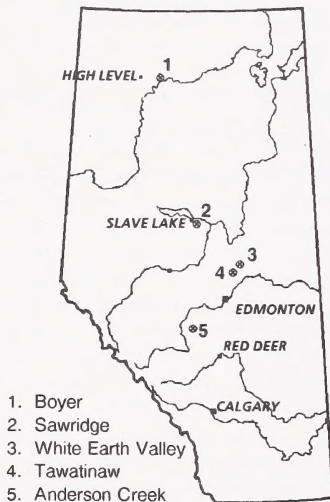
## New Sites (continued from page 1)

relatively undisturbed in a region largely cleared for agriculture, and is particularly attractive to wildlife.

In the Fort Vermilion area, a half section (130 ha) of land along the **Boyer River** valley has been added to the program. It contains a small oxbow lake that is a resting area for waterfowl. As with the Tawatinaw site, it is in a region that has been developed largely for agricultural purposes. This site was recommended by the district Public Lands Division agrologist, Darren Labonte, in High Level.

To replace an existing forest ecosystem research site that was under increasing land use conflicts, the University of Alberta selected a 97 ha parcel along Highway 2, 30 km southeast of the town of Slave Lake. The **Sawridge Natural Area** has a diversity of habitats, including wetlands and mature coniferous forest stands.

The last of the five areas in this group to be placed under a Natural Area reservation is a 65 ha parcel that was recently purchased to add to the **White Earth Valley Natural Area**. White Earth Valley is immediately south of Long Lake Provincial Park, and northwest of Smoky Lake. This additional quarter section will consolidate the lands along this scenic and sensitive valley.



Map 1. Location of five new sites under protective notation.

## STEWARD HAPPENINGS:

### OUTSTANDING WORK !

**Rainbow Equitation Society** (volunteer steward for Bridge Lake, Opal, Halfmoon Lake, Halfway Lake and Taylor Lake Natural Areas) is in the process of building a parking lot facility and doing some fencing and trail work for Halfmoon Lake with the help of funding from the Natural Areas Program. However, the funding will certainly not cover all the donated labour. .... **Mike Glossop** (steward for Wabamun South Natural Area) has put in many volunteer hours this fall on his site, building fences, putting up signs, delivering information packages to residents adjacent to the Natural Area and picking up garbage. .... **Daryl Wig** (volunteer steward for Coleman Natural Area) made the

most outstanding clean-up contribution recorded this year during his last inspection when he took out three garbage bags of picnic waste and had 165 kg (364 lbs.) of household/construction debris trucked out. These are only a few examples of the tremendous amount of work that has been done this year. Thanks!...to all stewards.

### OUTSTANDING INSPECTIONS !

There were many volunteers this fall who decided it would be a good idea to inspect their Natural Area(s) before snow fell. Thanks for all the great information, recommendations and clean-up. In fact, none of the Calgary area stewards were able to give a short interview to the Calgary Herald one weekend, because almost all were out inspecting their Natural Area(s)! However, while many of our volunteers have escaped the snow, our staff must admit to being snowed under with the resulting paperwork. So, yes, we're afraid that some of that is also outstanding!



### OUTSTANDING SIGHTINGS !

**Don Morden** (steward for Telfordville Natural Area) saw a flock of 23 whooping cranes (yes, this is a huge number for whoopers) near Hanna.

### OUTSTANDING STATISTICS !

Currently, 124 stewards are managing 100 candidate and reserved Natural Areas. This is a significant increase since the Volunteer Steward Program began in 1987. It's amazing what people can accomplish when they work together!

### OUTSTANDING NEW YEAR!

1990 hails the start of a new decade in conservation. Through your valuable contributions to the Natural Areas Program, you help pave the way into a new age of environmental awareness. From everyone in the Natural Areas Program, thank you and may your New Year be filled with joy and prosperity.

### UPCOMING MEETING

The Alberta Native Plant Council will be holding its third annual meeting/workshop in Calgary on February 17, 1990. Plan on attending this interesting event titled "**Endangered Plant Spaces**".

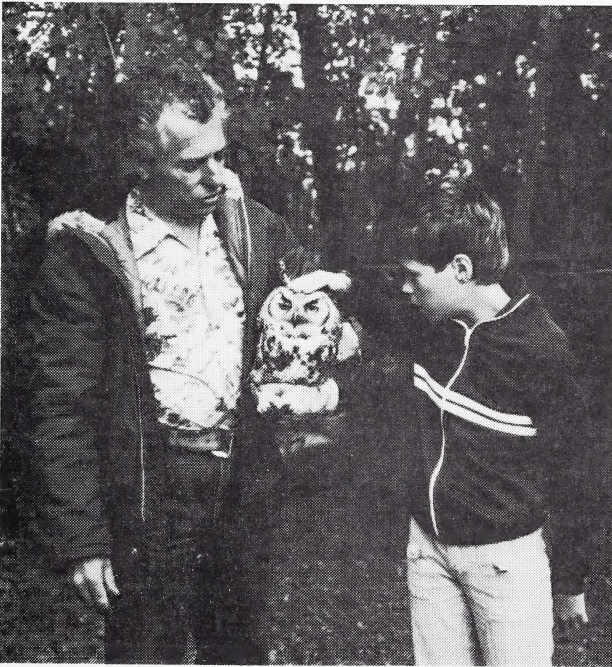
## Why is That Weasel in My Bed?

by Barb McCord

An early appreciation for nature and animals, fostered by his parents as much as was possible in the big-city landscape of London, England, grew into a lifelong avocation for Ted Blowers.

A stint in the army took Ted out of London to a small, rural town where the sense of "space" and proximity to things more natural reinforced his desire to do nature-related work, specifically with animals.

He became an inspector with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and found the "job" grew to fulfill his personal commitment to the rights and protection of animals. Troubled by the chronic lack of staff and resources that didn't allow RSPCA efforts to extend to wildlife protection, Ted helped to spearhead the formation of a wildlife observation society. This loosely knit group of volunteers took responsibility for injured wildlife, and ensured the animals were directed to people who had the time and skill to undertake the often intensive rehabilitation required.



*Ted and his nephew examine a great-horned owl just before its release.*

Ted became personally involved in numerous rehabilitation projects to the point that this job became his life. Such is his level of commitment that he thinks nothing of carrying an ailing weasel strapped to his chest in a "snuggli" 24 hours a day. He credits the support of his wife, Dawn, and his family in his efforts, and notes that Dawn "may be the only woman to have ever slept with a weasel ... other than me of course!"

Through his RSPCA work, Ted also became involved in teaching programs and it was through that experience - trying

to raise the level of environmental awareness of both school children and their teachers - that it became clear to him that the key environmental problem was habitat destruction. "Ever since that time, I've worked to try and save some of it," says Ted.

While on a vacation to Canada in 1969, he was overwhelmed by seeing so much wildlife in its natural habitat. He was startled, however, by the lack of awareness among Canadians about the richness of their wildlife resource. Ted talked to many people "who didn't know what they had." Besides the compelling attraction of the country, he felt he "could do better work here," in terms of consciousness-raising, so he moved his family to Canada the following year.

The family settled in Little Smoky and Ted became immediately involved in the community, working to raise the profile of the region and also as an active participant in environmental issues. He has served in such positions as local councillor, bylaw enforcement officer, Board of Governors for Grande Prairie College and as the Peace River Region's representative to the 1973 Non-government Organizations Conference on Human Settlements.

It is through his volunteer work of rehabilitating injured wildlife, however, that he has forged his reputation in the district. Ted soon became aware that the problems constraining the efforts of the RSPCA also limited the operations of local Fish and Wildlife Division officers in Alberta. He saw further that there was a great need for his type of rehabilitative work with animals and especially raptors and other birds. In 1986, he received the Fish and Wildlife Division's Bighorn Award for that work. True to his ideals, however while remarking how appreciative he is of that honour, he noted that money spent on the awards banquet would have been better directed to funding rehabilitation projects!

Strong opinions and the courage to voice them has made Ted controversial at times, but he continues to seek avenues to pursue his environmental causes. Becoming a Natural Area steward struck him as a good avenue. Ted has been the steward of the Little Smoky Natural Area for just over a year and is quietly "gearing up" his campaign to increase awareness of the area's attributes, natural habitat quality and potential for nonconsumptive recreation.

His main campaign is to expand the area under protective notation, since he is concerned that the portion currently protected has very little habitat potential compared to the surrounding area. Ted's "expanded" Natural Area is at the confluence of three rivers: the Waskahagan, Little Smoky and Iosegun. Part of the unprotected area is old-growth forest that is one of the few remaining stands of spruce in the area, and provides critical habitat for old-growth bird species such as the pileated woodpecker and many mammal species.

Another unprotected portion is a gravel deposit that has been mined and, if specifically reclaimed (to enlarge sloughs, for example) and managed, he feels the area would be a tremendous staging area for many species of birds.

Since nonconsumptive uses like bird-watching, hiking, cross-country skiing, etc., are compatible with Natural Area

## Ted Blowers (Continued from Page 3)

goals, Ted feels that the expanded Natural Area has great tourism potential for these types of activities. He's sure that many people (especially European visitors) are attracted to "tourist experiences" that offer exposure to wildlife in natural habitats, and that this potential could be tapped while at the same time protecting a local area with important natural attributes from development.

Current uses, such as local timber permits, would not be incompatible if the forest was selectively logged to preserve habitat. "I'm not anti-hunting, either. I'm anti-destruction of habitat," Ted says. "In fact," he suggests, "local outfitters, for example, could extend their season by guiding non-consumptive users like bird-watchers and tourists to locations such as the Little Smoky area."

"I'm not an optimist where the environment is concerned," Ted says gravely. He's concerned that people may already have had too many negative impacts on an ecosystem they considered themselves external to, instead of part of. He's not sure the planet can recover, especially when mankind's definition of "a better life" continues to be a materialistic one, rather than one more environmentally compatible. Still, he continues to be passionately committed to doing his share to protect and promote the environment, and the Little Smoky Natural Area is one small corner where he hopes to make a big difference.

## TENNESSEE CONFERENCE NOTES

by Sandra Myers

I was very fortunate to attend the 16th Annual Natural Areas Conference that was held October 16-20, 1989 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since its inception in 1973, the Natural Areas Conference has become the annual meeting for resource managers, biologists, ecologists, agency administrators and volunteers (mostly for the North American continent) who are concerned with identification, evaluation, management, protection and study of natural areas and other elements of natural ecological diversity.

Concurrent sessions were held on four major topics:

1. Managing Exotic Species in Natural Areas;
2. Nature Preserve Design and Establishment;
3. Managing and Protecting Cave and Cave Faunas; and
4. Characteristics, Management and Restoration of Old-growth Temperate Forest Ecosystems.

Several new strategies were suggested and discussed regarding management issues related to natural disasters (e.g., Hurricane Hugo) and climatic change. I brought back numerous resource materials on these topics. If you are interested in reviewing any of this information, please give me a call.



## SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you! to all stewards who responded to the October 1989 volunteer steward needs assessment. All responses were tabulated in the following way: all topics rated "high" were given 10 points, all topics rated "medium" were given 5 points and all topics rated "low" were given 1 point. Total points for each topic were then calculated and all comments were listed. As a result of what you told us, the following topics will be featured at the 1990 conference:

### Priority 1 Topics (topics that received 250 points or more):

- site inventory techniques;
- developing a site management plan; and
- book sale.

### Priority 2 Topics (topics that received 200-249 points):

- bird watching for beginners;
- moss and fern identification;
- introduction to plant identification;
- inspecting your Natural Area;
- site monitoring techniques;
- managing multiple use Natural Areas;
- involving neighbours and the public in Natural Area management; and
- orientation for new and experienced volunteers.

### Priority 3 Topics (topics that received 150-199 points):

- advanced bird-watching;
- mammal identification;
- insect identification;
- trail development and maintenance;
- leading your Natural Area management committee;
- constructive ways to handle conflict;
- managing people and site emergencies;
- introduction to Alberta's natural regions;
- photography; and
- movies related to Natural Areas management.

### Priority 4 Topics (topics that received 100-149 points):

- reptiles and amphibians of Alberta;
- leading safe day-trips;
- finding your way: orienteering;
- how to safely visit mountain Natural Areas; and
- winter outdoor safety skills.

### Additional Comments:

Many stewards gave additional comments on what they needed to make this conference work for them. All comments will be given to the conference planning committee, which will try to incorporate all ideas into the conference program. You asked us to include field trips to Natural Areas, case studies, tips on interpreting Natural Areas to visitors, environmental legislation, information on the public hearing process, ideas on how to propose or enlarge a Natural Area, a slide show on Natural Areas by stewards, ideas on how to write trail guides, information on insurance, tips on resolving user conflicts, techniques to assess grazing impacts, information on how to become a registered society, and you asked us to involve children in the conference.